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Projects & Experiments

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National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

The Library of Congress
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Study of volunteer contributions

Assesses current worth; recommends development

Annual net volunteer contributions to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) free reading program are significant. A study completed in 1980 estimates their worth minimally at $3 million. It concludes, however, that such services can be enhanced greatly through stronger administrative leadership and planned program activities.[1]

The study considered volunteer utilization by NLS as well as the 160 network libraries and other network agencies throughout the country that cooperate to deliver special library services to some 300,000 blind and physically handicapped individuals. Data were collected through mail surveys, telephone interviews, and on-site visits to representative network agencies. These methods produced information about individual agencies and now provide the basis for comparative analyses and for future data collection.

Objectives

Objectives of the study were to:

- determine categories of tasks currently performed by volunteers and estimate the amount of time given yearly to each category
- evaluate network and NLS time, training, funding, staff effort, and other administrative resources that support volunteer programs
- analyze cost and program effectiveness of volunteer services in contrast to use of paid resources
- analyze use of volunteers compared with standards set by the American Library Association (ALA)[2]
- project the most effective future use of volunteers for specific tasks.

Findings

According to the study, 72.6 percent of all network agencies use volunteer services for some or all of the six categories of tasks identified: production of recorded and braille reading materials, repair of disc and cassette playback machines, circulation and maintenance of books and equipment, other reader services, outreach activities, and administration of program services.

In 1979, for example, 10,937 volunteers participated in this network program. The largest number of volunteers—4,486—were involved in production of materials, the area of most significant volunteer contribution. Production of materials, as defined by the study, involves assessment of reading materials in the collection; narration of books and other materials; monitoring, reviewing, and duplication of recorded matter; braille transcription, proofreading, thermoforming, and binding; large-type transcription; labeling and packaging both braille and recorded material; and copyright clearance. A total of 338,338 annual hours was estimated for these tasks at a gross dollar value of $1,871,592.[3]

The study reports similar statistics and findings for each of the remaining five categories of tasks. NLS has noted that the data are based to a large extent on estimates and are probably conservative, since dollar values for services were assigned at minimum levels and most participants did not fully document volunteer hours contributed.

Volunteer contributions in the category of reader services were identified as representing the highest ratio of volunteer time versus cost. This category requires the least amount of staff training time and direct expenses. It also provides the most personal service performed by volunteers. Some specific tasks include reading to patrons in the library or at home, transporting patrons to the library, and delivering books or machines to patrons.

Other areas of effective volunteer utilization in terms of cost versus volunteer time were identified as narration of recorded read-

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ing materials, tape monitoring, book inspection, and machine repair. The high success of the machine-repair program was attributed to the electronics expertise of the Telephone Pioneers of America, an organization of senior and retired telephone-industry employees. About 3,000 Telephone Pioneers work directly with network agencies to provide most repair services for disc and cassette machines.

Altogether, the study calculates the cost in 1979 of administering about 750,000 hours of volunteer services in all categories of tasks—with an estimated gross value of $3,940,121—was about $1 million.

Recommendations

Thirteen recommendations resulted from the study. They confirm the network need and desire for an increased role of an NLS volunteer coordinator and NLS support staff to provide expertise and technical assistance in all areas of volunteer use. According to the study, this guidance is needed to establish and manage volunteer programs, develop training materials, conduct workshops, and provide consultation in the many aspects of volunteer utilization to assure conformance with the ALA standards.

Specific recommendations are:

1. Review overall NLS strategy for providing technical assistance to network agencies as pertains to volunteer utilization;
2. Provide a full-time NLS volunteer activities coordinator and support staff with a broad scope of responsibility for giving technical assistance to network agencies;
3. Produce an NLS manual on effective volunteer utilization;
4. Establish at the national level a coordinated system for recognizing volunteer participation throughout the network;
5. Increase assistance to network agencies to identify volunteers through the mass media;
6. Foster and strengthen a back-up machine-repair system that utilizes volunteers in prisons and other institutions more effectively;
7. Assure maximum quality of materials produced by network volunteers;
8. Commit adequate budget and personnel to management of volunteer programs at network agencies;
9. Improve methods for collecting data on volunteer use;
10. Strengthen efforts to publicize and implement the ALA standards for volunteer utilization;
11. Consider the use by NLS of highly technical volunteer expertise;
12. Study in further detail the actual costs associated with utilizing volunteer groups versus paid staff to NLS music for services; and
13. Study in a more in-depth manner other specific areas of volunteer use.

Future implications

In response to these recommendations, NLS has extended the role of its volunteer coordinator so that full-time attention can be given to development of an overall strategy and to implementation of the many actions proposed. Video training programs, manuals, and standards for quality control are being developed and revised. Special publicity materials are in preparation.

Improved data-collection procedures are being devised, and an increased number of workshops for volunteers are being planned. Plans have been formulated to make the NLS volunteer program an active component of the newly established NLS consumer relations section.

Notes

1. *An Evaluation of Volunteers in the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped*, prepared by Applied Management Sciences of Silver Spring, Maryland.
2. *Standards of Service for the Library of Congress Network for the Blind and Physically Handicapped*, published in 1979.
3. For purposes of the study, each volunteer task was assigned a skill level as follows:
   - 1 for clerical work learned on the job
   - 2 for technical work learned in formal training or on the job that requires considerable experience and general knowledge
   - 3 for specialized work that requires prior formal education or highly specialized training or certification.

   Hourly rates were calculated at or near the minimum wage for level 1; level 2 was calculated at the mid-salary range for nonsupervisory positions; and level 3 rates were calculated on the average pay for school teachers, which is in the lower range of professional wages. Rates and tasks vary throughout the network.

Technology

Production test center established for braille

NLS and the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) are cooperating in testing advanced technological approaches to braille production. Under a five-year agreement between the two agencies, an experimental laboratory has been established at AFB in New

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York City. Equipment is provided on loan by NLS, which also determines the projects to be tested. AFB provides the space and personnel to operate the equipment.

The test facility will be used for experimentation, not for production of books and magazines for the NLS program. Production equipment and methods will be analyzed for their effectiveness.

Equipment provided thus far includes the Kurzweil Print-to-Braille system developed for NLS by Kurzweil Computer Products, and the Braille Translation System manufactured by Triformation Systems, Inc. and Duxbury Systems. Other advanced-technology equipment is either on order (an electrostatic machine for producing raised-line graphics) or under study (a high-speed braille embosser).

Early tests will attempt highly automated print-to-braille translation using optical character recognition input rather than keyboarding, and complete production and duplication of braille cassettes at a single site.

Technology

Users evaluate cassette-braille machines

Cassette-braille machines are being evaluated by more than 150 readers in five cities throughout the country. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to determine reader acceptance of the concept.

"Cassette braille," as distinguished from traditional paper braille, is an increasingly common term for what was initially called "paperless braille" or "electronic braille." It refers to a system by which specially designed cassette recorder/players receive, store, and play back braille characters. The braille line of twenty, thirty-two, or forty characters is on the top surface of the machine. The dots for each braille character are pins raised above the surface by piezoelectric or solenoid drivers. The machines are portable, and store braille in a much smaller space than on paper.

Several firms began work on these machines in the mid-'70s. About a half-dozen devices are already in production or have achieved workable prototype status. Most such devices use an audio-grade cassette and provide both audio and braille operation. The cassette-braille machines do not translate print to braille any more than audio-cassette machines translate print to voice. Signals activating the pins are programmed onto the cassette tape.

NLS has purchased more than 100 machines from three different manufacturers for user evaluation. The reading materials are five magazines popular with readers and offered through the NLS program in paper-braille form. The reader evaluation should be concluded by the end of 1981.

Technology

C–80 cassette machines to have speech compression

For many years NLS has been following the emerging technology of speech expansion and compression. This process would allow readers to play cassette tapes at faster or slower speeds than normal while maintaining normal voice pitch. Advances in custom large scale integrated circuits have now made it possible to place a pitch corrector inside the C–80 cassette player for approximately $10 per machine.

Background

In the early 1970s, two books were produced with some high-quality speech compression applied to the master tape before duplication. Field tests with these books made it apparent that the reader, not the producer, should control the speed at which text is read.

Since 1971 NLS has provided cassette playback machines with a variable speed control. Many program users can read from 25 percent below normal to 100 percent above normal, even though the narrator's voice drones at the lower speeds and sounds like Donald Duck at the higher ones. With pitch correction, the narration will sound more natural, and it should be possible for more people to enjoy reading recorded material at other than normal speed.

Technology

The circuit being developed for the C–80 machine is the AmBiChron, designed by Richard Koch. The audio input voltage is converted to on/off pulses by a process called continuously variable slope delta modulation at a rate controlled by the motor speed. These

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pulses, at anywhere from 25,000 to 100,000 bits per second, are stored in a 1,024-bit memory and retrieved at about 50,000 bits per second.

When the tape is being played faster than normal, more bits are being put into the memory than can be retrieved, so some must occasionally be discarded. When the tape is running at a slower than normal speed, some bits are recycled into the memory to keep a constant stream going, since data bits are being taken out faster than they are put in. The output pulses from the memory are then converted back to audio by a delta demodulator.

The process degrades the signal-to-noise ratio to about 30 decibels, adds reverberation to the voice during expansion, and chops the signal during compression.

The C–80 machine

Because the pitch restorer adds some distortion of one kind while removing another, the addition of this device to the C–80 machines is to some extent experimental. No one has produced so many machines with pitch restorers before, and reader reaction has not yet been received on a large scale.

The number of controls will remain the same; tape speed and pitch restoration will be adjusted by the same control, from half speed to double speed. If the noise of the pitch restorer is objectionable, the speed control can be placed in its normal position, which bypasses the device. The machine will not provide the variable-speed option without pitch compensation.

Technology

On/off remote controls planned for handicapped

NLS is developing on/off wireless remote control systems that will be suitable for use with both the cassette players and phonographs distributed to program users. These devices are primarily intended for more severely handicapped patrons.

Several control functions will be available, including breath switching, touch plate, and a standard push-button control.

The controls will require no special installation. The transmitter/receiver devices use ultrasonic technology.

Several prototype systems will be evaluated this year for conformance with specifications. After prototype approval, the controls will be produced in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of patrons throughout the NLS network.

Technology

Cassette dictionary being voice indexed

Voice indexing of cassettes is a process that will make possible the production of useful reference material in recorded format. The problem has been one of information retrieval—easy access to the needed information.

Voice indexing is a technique that uses key words to help readers quickly locate specific information. Index words are audible when the cassette is played in the fast-forward mode. When the desired entry is located, the reader stops the tape and resumes play at regular speed to hear the full entry for the key word.

The 55,000-entry *Concise Heritage Dictionary* is now being recorded, after testing to determine that such a lengthy and complex undertaking would succeed and determining which indexing procedures would be most useful to readers. Production of the dictionary will take about two years, with distribution on 15/16 ips 4-side cassettes planned for 1983. The dictionary may be offered for sale, as well as being available on loan from network libraries.

Three voice-indexed books have been produced thus far by NLS: *Access National Parks: A Guide for Handicapped Visitors* (RC 12640) in 1979, *Cooking for Myself* (RC 14999) in 1980, and *Everyone's Money Book* (RC 16816) in 1981. These books proved that the technology worked and helped to refine narration techniques, which must be precise in time and accurate in speech. The first two also served as a field text with readers, who provided useful comments and encouraged production of standard reference material, such as a dictionary.

One reader summed up the reason for pursuing this new recording process: "Handicapped people have long needed convenient access to a reference work that others take for granted."

International activities

Special-format material more available worldwide

Blind and physically handicapped citizens of foreign countries can now enjoy reading many of the recorded and braille publications produced by NLS. At the same time, NLS plans to supplement its collection of recorded and braille books with English and foreign-language titles acquired from a variety of outside sources.

Acquisitions

NLS is working with foreign libraries for blind and visually handicapped individuals to establish procedures for the acquisition of titles by purchase or exchange and gift arrangements. Sample cassette books have been received from Australia, Spain, Poland, and Argentina. French-language cassette books have been purchased from Canada. Shipments of braille titles have been received from Great Britain, Brazil, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. Libraries in several other countries have expressed a willingness to provide special-format materials. The most serious obstacle to the acquisition of such materials involves copyright problems. Many foreign libraries willing to make recorded materials available are hampered by unclear or restrictive copyright laws.

Much of the special-format material acquired from outside sources will be available in limited quantity. NLS will not distribute such materials to network libraries. Instead, a special collection for limited copy/limited interest books will be housed in one of the NLS multistate centers. Special-collection titles will be cataloged in the NLS microfiche listing and will be available to interested readers on loan through their cooperating library.

NLS offerings to foreign countries

With the cooperation of American magazine publishers, NLS can offer subscriptions of braille and recorded magazines to foreign libraries and organizations serving the reading needs of blind and physically handicapped people. The braille edition of *Psychology Today* is now available to blind readers at the University of Hong Kong, and other magazines such as *Better Homes and Gardens, Family Health, Popular Mechanics, Braille Variety News,* and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* are being sent to eligible foreign libraries and organizations.

Foreign libraries for blind and physically handicapped readers may also acquire certain braille and recorded books for their permanent collections. Many braille books in the NLS collection can be offered on exchange, and procedures also exist for foreign libraries to obtain authorization from U.S. publishers to use NLS intermaster tapes to make cassette copies for their own collections. Libraries in Australia, Canada, and South Africa have taken advantage of these procedures.

Foreign libraries can also obtain special-format books, which may not be copied because of copyright considerations, on international interlibrary loan for a period of six weeks. Within the past few months, NLS has sent loan shipments to libraries in Canada, New Zealand, France, South Africa, Panama, Costa Rica, and the West Indies.

The NLS cassette player is available for purchase by foreign libraries from the NLS contract producer of the machines, Telex Communications, Inc. To date approximately 20,000 adapted versions have been sold to twenty-eight agencies serving blind individuals in nineteen countries around the world.

International cooperation

NLS offers information and advice in many areas dealing with the production and quality control of special-format reading materials. It receives many foreign visitors interested in NLS operations, with a view toward implementation of comparable technology, standards, or procedures in their own countries. During the last year, NLS entertained visitors from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Ghana, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Venezuela, West Germany, and Yugoslavia.

It also hosted an international meeting of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind's Subcommittee on Library Services. Participants from Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Spain, and the U.S. discussed service to Spanish-speaking readers in North and South America. As a result of this conference, plans are being developed to create a talking-book production center in Sao Paulo, Brazil, for recorded books in Spanish and Portuguese. Also, the national organization for blind individuals in Spain is transferring its entire recorded library onto NLS-format

cassettes.

NLS works through the International Federation of Library Associations, Round Table of Libraries for the Blind (RTLB), to overcome legal and technical obstacles to the international flow of special-format materials. RTLB, established to further international cooperation, was started by NLS Director Frank Kurt Cylke, who served as its first chairman. Current considerations are:

- removing copyright obstacles to the free interchange of special-format materials
- promoting uniform mailing and customs regulations for the international shipment of such materials
- promulgation of new braille and talking-book technology
- standardization of braille and talking-book formats
- international bibliographic control of special-format materials.

Efforts have also been directed toward a study of braille in Africa, an African seminar, development of a directory of libraries serving blind and physically handicapped people, and improvement of procedures for international exchange.

Consumer studies

Nationwide surveys identify users and goals

Two extensive surveys with users and potential users of the NLS program have been completed in the last year. These studies confirm the need for projects underway and provide a firm basis for determining future goals.

The nonuser survey

The nonuser survey, conducted in 1977 with a random sampling of households and institutions nationwide, was designed to determine the number and characteristics of potential users in the population and their awareness of the program. The survey was completed with the submission of the contractor's report in the fall of 1980.[1]

Among the significant findings are: 3.1 million people in the United States are eligible for the program; 2.6 million of those identified live in households and 500 thousand are in nursing homes, hospitals, or schools for handicapped individuals. Two-thirds of the total number have a visual impairment; the rest have a physical handicap. Forty-seven percent are sixty-five years old or older. Eighty-five percent have never used the program, but 65 percent of these had some awareness of the program. Four-fifths of the remaining 15 percent are current users and one-fifth are former users.

The methodology of the survey followed statistically reliable sampling methods. The initial problem was to locate potential users. An earlier, limited survey had shown that most handicapped people have a telephone, and thus could be reached by a simple screening procedure. The screening used a piggyback approach—one question added to a periodically conducted market survey asking if there were anyone in the household who could not read regular print or turn the pages of a book.[2]

Those answering positively were separated out with name and address, age, sex, and nature of physical problem. A sampling of that group was later telephoned for in-depth questions about their health, social interaction, and recreational needs and interests including reading.

The user survey

The user survey was conducted in 1979[3] The purpose was to collect more information about patron characteristics and attitudes toward the program.

Ten thousand reader-subscribers to *Talking Book Topics* and *Braille Book Review* were surveyed by mail, with questions in large-print format.[4] A response was obtained from more than 40 percent of those surveyed.

Findings from the user survey show that approximately 50 percent of readers are sixty-five or older and 57 percent of readers responding had at least a high school education. Bestsellers topped the reading-interest list, with historical fiction, humor, and biography also major interests for more than 40 percent of readers. Attitudes toward book selection by the library split about half and half, with 51 percent indicating thay would like the library to make selections "very often" or "sometimes" and 49 percent indicating that the library should make selections "seldom" or "never." Seventy-one percent of readers indicated that their preference for male or female narrators depends on the subject matter, or that they felt that it made no difference.

Recommendations

Recommendations from both surveys fall into three general areas: outreach activities to in-

form the public and potential users about the program, playback machines that are easier to understand and to operate, and better delivery of services. NLS and network staff are using the findings to determine the short-term and long-term impacts on program and budget planning.

A major statistical difference between the two surveys is for patrons in institutions. The nonuser survey identified that about 16 percent of potential readers would be in institutions; the user survey indicated that only about 9 percent of actual patrons live in nursing homes and schools. This finding supports the conclusion that more efforts need to be made to extend services to that group of blind and physically handicapped readers.

Notes

1. *A Survey to Determine the Extent of the Eligible User Population Not Currently Being Served or Not Aware of the Programs of the Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped*, prepared by the American Foundation for the Blind in New York City.
2. Trendex, Inc., of Westport, Connecticut, conducted the screening and the in-depth interviews.
3. *Readership Characteristics and Attitudes: Service to Blind and Physically Handicapped Library Users*, prepared by Market Facts, Inc. in Washington, D.C.
4. *Talking Book Topics* and *Braille Book Review* are bimonthly magazines listing books recently produced for the NLS program. *Talking Book Topics* lists recorded books and is produced in large-print and disc formats. *Braille Book Review* lists braille and is produced in large-print and braille formats. Almost all program users subscribe to one or both of these publications.

Outreach: PSA project

National effort goes local

Two TV and four radio public service announcements (PSAs) aimed at raising public awareness about talking-book and braille book and magazine library services have been released to some 500 television and 3500 radio stations across the country. Two more TV spots will be distributed in 1981.

Most of this year's PSAs end with local library telephone numbers instead of a national 800 number. The tags refer viewers and listeners to the nearest network library serving blind and physically handicapped individuals.

To mass produce localized TV spots, several hundred prints were made from four internegatives; separate audio and visual tags were then spliced on for each of nearly 100 states, cities, or other markets. For radio, submaster recordings were made for each library market; again, local tags were spliced onto each spot.

Since 1978, PSA public-education projects have resulted in an average annual increase in new readers of more than 50 percent. Statistics will be compiled by January 1982 on this year's project, and an evaluation made on the effectiveness of local tags as response mechanisms and in promoting good placement and airplay by broadcasters.

Accessible space

Guide published to barrier-free libraries

NLS has recently published a planning guide to barrier-free library construction or renovation.[1] The guide stresses function, safety, and enjoyment of facilities and is intended to stimulate thought that will result in a "building capable of providing patrons the services they require at minimal cost and maximal efficiency and productivity."

It covers the progress of the project from feasibility study through funding, functional planning, site selection, design development in several stages, working with consultants, contract documents, bidding and negotiation, and construction.[2]

Architects' drawings are supplied for specific functions, arrangements, or work flows. Appendixes list space requirements for specific personnel functions; give approximate time schedules for renovation or new construction; and provide an accessibility checklist that covers fifteen items from the parking lot to hazards within the building.

Planning

The first planning stage requires analyzing, with full participation from representative users, what employees and patrons, handicapped and nonhandicapped, do in the library, or might reasonably wish to do, and what long-range goals indicate they should be able to do—and then relating all those activities to each other, to the number of people involved in them, and to the funds and space available. Thus, careful analysis and planning with regard to space, equipment,

and furniture may allow a staff meeting room to double efficiently as a demonstration and instructional workshop for patrons, a meeting place for handicapped patrons and volunteers, and housing for a core collection of books on physical handicaps. Or analysis of circulation patterns may show that most returned books are very shortly sent out to other patrons and therefore a holding shelf near shipping and receiving would save much time and effort.

This functional planning applies to both new construction and renovation and is done by a team which includes the director, the regional librarian, and the architect. Choosing an architect is one of the first steps in the functional planning process. Factors to be considered in the selection include the size and nature of the firm's professional staff and special qualifications for designing libraries or barrier-free buildings.

For further information about these projects or about the NLS free library program, contact:
Office of the Director
National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
Library of Congress
Washington, DC 20542

Accessibility

The basic, most elementary, requirements for barrier-free design are accessibility to the building from outside and accessibility within the building to library facilities, water fountains, telephones, light switches, and restroom facilities.

Safety

Accessibility without safety is meaningless. Imaginatively going through various activities and talking with handicapped patrons about them reveal many potential hazards. For example, the knees of wheelchair users without feeling in their legs must be protected from under-the-sink hot water pipes. The emergency phone in an elevator for patron use must be low enough for the wheelchair user to reach easily. Audible warnings may be needed for patron safety. Nonskid floors and rounded corners are the norm for libraries for physically handicapped persons.

Convenience

A library for blind and physically handicapped persons must be designed for its patron's convenience. A change in floor covering can define areas, warning the blind patron of an area with obstacles. Brailled handrails that stop short before a door can identify the room beyond. Wall recesses at floor level for guide canes can perform a similar function, indicating the end of a wall. Patron elevators should have brailled call buttons at a convenient height for wheelchair users and audible as well as visual signals to indicate the location of the elevator.

Aesthetics

Full accessibility means the ability to use a building safely, conveniently, and with pleasure. Music or a safely located splashing water fountain is a purely aesthetic factor in making the library attractive and welcoming—psychologically accessible—to blind patrons. Art should be capable of being appreciated tactilely. Landscaping designed to consider blind patrons will feature aromatic plants.

Ideas abound for making a library fully accessible to blind and physically handicapped individuals. Some are expensive, others merely require forethought. Careful planning can not only increase a library's efficiency but also allow the incorporation of as many features of the "ideal" library as available funds permit.

Notes

1. *Planning Barrier Free Libraries: A Guide for Renovation and Construction of Libraries Serving Blind and Physically Handicapped Readers*, prepared by Charles A. Moss, Jr., of Moss, Garikes, and Associates Architects, Inc., of Birmingham, Alabama.
2. The guide is an outgrowth of the experience gained in planning and constructing a new regional library in Alabama, a project that took two-and-one-half years from the first feasibility study to realization.

About NLS

50 YEARS OF SERVICE 1931 - 1981

A free national library program of braille and recorded materials for blind and physically handicapped persons is administered by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), Library of Congress. With the cooperation of authors and publishers who grant permission to use copyrighted works, NLS selects and produces full-length books and magazines in braille and on recorded disc and cassette. Reading materials and playback machines are distributed to a cooperating network of fifty-six regional and more than one hundred subregional (local) libraries, where they are circulated to eligible borrowers. Reading materials are sent to borrowers and returned to libraries by postage-free mail. Established by an act of Congress in 1931 to serve blind adults, the program was expanded in 1952 to include children, in 1962 to provide music materials, and again in 1966 to include individuals with other physical impairments that prevent the reading of standard print.